



## University of North Dakota UND Scholarly Commons

---

Theses and Dissertations

Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects

---

January 2012

# Voices Of The Prairie

Jeanette Kenner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/theses>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kenner, Jeanette, "Voices Of The Prairie" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1252.  
<https://commons.und.edu/theses/1252>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Senior Projects at UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [zeinebyousif@library.und.edu](mailto:zeinebyousif@library.und.edu).

VOICES OF THE PRAIRIE

by

Jeanette Evelyn Kenner

Bachelor of Arts, University of Minnesota, Moorhead, 1972

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May

2012

This thesis, submitted by Jeanette Evelyn Kenner in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

Dr. Kathleen McLennan

Chairperson

Brad Reissig

Committee Member

Emily Cherry

Committee Member

This thesis is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the Graduate School at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.

Dr. Wayne Swisher

Dean of the Graduate School

April 20, 2012

Date

Title               Voices of the Prairie

Department   Theatre Arts

Degree           Master of Arts

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a graduate degree from the University of North Dakota, I agree that the library of this University shall make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for extensive copying for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in her absence, by the Chairperson of the department or the dean of the Graduate School. It is understood that any copying or publication or other use of this thesis or part thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of North Dakota in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Jeanette Evelyn Kenner

April 19, 2012

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
CHAPTER	
I. WHAT IS READERS THEATRE .....	1
II. TRANSFERING LITERATURE TO READERS THEATRE.....	14
III. VOICES OF THE PRAIRIE.....	25
WORKS CITEED.....	101
REFERENCES.....	102

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Two readers offstage focus.....	7
2. More than two readers offstage focus.....	8

## ABSTRACT

*Voices of the Prairie* is a Readers Theatre production depicting the lives of both Native American and immigrant women on the Dakota Prairie in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The script is adapted from historical accounts, journals, and letters of the time period. This document defines the Reader Theatre genre and recounts the process of adapting materials to the Readers Theatre format for a theatrical and educational production. The production processes of writing, rehearsing and performing are described. The entire script is included along with an evaluation of the theatrical and educational merit of the production.

## CHAPTER 1

### WHAT IS READERS THEATRE?

Readers Theatre is a combination of oral interpretation and conventional theatre, and draws most of its terminology, techniques and principles from both disciplines. It is a presentational art form where two or more oral interpreters use vocal and physical suggestions to make literature live in the audience's imagination rather than literally on the stage. When I wrote this script, *Voices of the Prairie*, my objectives were both artistic and educational. This would be a full stage production using lights, sound effects, music, and costumes but the performance would follow the rules of Reader's Theatre. My educational objective was to make student's aware of the day to day lives of their ancestors, both Native American and white settlers.

Literature of all types can be adapted to Readers Theatre: classic, modern, historical, fables, biographies, and journals. The writer of the script must use the literature as it is written, preserving the context and the integrity of the original document. Some condensing or cutting is permissible, as long as it does not change the integrity of the literature.

I was introduced to Readers Theatre in college at The University of Minnesota, Moorhead as an undergraduate in the early 70's. It was offered as an elective, and I was



immediately drawn to the genre, and realized its usefulness in education. Knowing I would eventually be teaching in a small ND school, I knew I could use it to teach literature and history in an entertaining, yet educational fashion. Its use would allow students to experience literature in a visual and audio manner, which would enhance learning by allowing the student to experience the literature, not just read it.

Readers Theatre would also be valuable for performance with very little cost and a minimum amount of rehearsal. Producing a main stage production is difficult in many schools because of cost and time. Readers Theatre would be an alternate avenue to use for performance.

### History of Readers Theatre

The form of Readers Theatre became popular in the 1950's, but the form of this oral art is not altogether new. According to Eugene Bahn of Wayne State University:

The roots of Readers Theatre can be traced to the dramatic practices of Fifth-century Greece when a recitative art arose carried on by wandering minstrels known as "rhapsodes." The rhapsode spoke, in in a measured recitative, portions of the national epics. Sometimes he read to the accompaniment of a lyre or other primitive musical instrument. . . A form of dialogue was carried on between two characters, read by two rhapsodes. One would read, in the first book of the *Iliad*, up to the quarrel of the princes; then a second reciter would step forward and declaim the speeches of Agamemnon while the other read the

part of Achilles. . . . a type of activity which approaches the art of the interpretative reading of plays was developed. . . . two characters were read by two different individuals, the drama began. (Coger & White 10)

Eventually, after teaching for several years, I realized I needed more study to be more creative in writing scripts. I attended two seminars, one in Toronto, Canada and one in London presented by The University of Southern Maine, and the Institute for Readers Theatre, San Diego, California. Each seminar lasted two weeks, and started with the basic rules of adapting the literature to a Readers Theatre script.

In our first session, we were given an Aesop's tale or another type of short adaptable literature. We were told to go through the script and first divide the literature into characters, including a narrator. Next we looked at words and phrases that could be omitted, without changing the integrity of the literature. We used highlighters to separate characters, a different color for each character, which gave us a visual of the flow of the dialogue, and also pointed out quickly if there was a problem with unbalanced character structure.

We were then allowed a quick rehearsal, and performed the script for the entire group. With input from our audience, we quickly learned what worked and what didn't work. We had learned how to take a piece of literature and adapt it to a stage production. This was the basic first task of adapting a script; from this we knew the rules: respect the integrity of the literature, assign characters and narrators, and be creative with performance.

When we signed up for the seminar, one of the requirements was to bring a story, whichever genre we wanted, and then, after we were trained in the writing sequence, we adapted it for Readers Theatre. Once the script was checked and accepted by the seminar facilitators, we had to cast our production, rehearse it, with the writer as director, and perform it for the entire group. The people attending were either college professors in theatre, teachers from elementary to high school in several different areas who wanted to learn the process and use it as an educational tool, and counselors who were learning to use it in therapy. The variety of material to script was diverse, and we had an opportunity to understand how to use different material in a successful adaption. We had fables, poems, historical characters, newspaper profile articles, and classic literature. All of them worked and were quite entertaining as well as educational.

### Literary Integrity

Readers Theatre respects the literary text, and seeks to discover and transmit the author's intentions within the context of the times in which it was created (Adams ix). Some believe it is impossible to know the author's intentions, and that literature also reflects the society of the time. They believe that external factors are more important than analysis of the literature, and sometimes allow their own personal beliefs to become more important than the author's message. Readers Theatre rejects this concept.

The Institute of Readers Theatre believes aesthetic considerations in the interpretation of a literary text hold the same significance as they do for music (ix).

Musicians strive to communicate the composer's vision and intention within an historical context. Those musicians who come closest to the composer's vision are considered, by critics, to have achieved the greatest art. The Institute of Readers theatre holds interpreters of the printed word to the same standard (ix).

Readers Theatre has a different approach than conventional theatre. Since the literature usually performed retains its narrative line, the audience is aware that the events are presentational, recalled from the past, or described in the present. The illusion of reality is substituted by the richness of a text that lets us enter characters' inner as well as outer lives, having direct access to their feelings, thoughts, motivations and philosophies as presented through the author's controlling will (Adams x). Instead of just reading the text of *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, Readers Theatre allows the audience to hear the text interpreted by the readers in a way that allows the audience members to feel and imagine the characters in their imagination, as if they were in the scene identifying with the situation as the author intended. Conveying the intent of the writer's work to audience members in a way that unlocks the member's imaginations is the reader's responsibility.

The interpreter's goal is to use vocal and physical suggestions to make the audience experience the literature in their imagination rather than literally on the stage. In Readers Theatre, the interpreters' imaginations must arouse the audiences' imagination (Tanner 2). The oral interpreter gives the audience the text and subtext of the literature, but since the interpreters usually dress in black, do not move, and retain

their scripts, the audience must generate its own visualization of the scenery, the costumes and the action. Although some styles of Readers Theatre allow minimal costume, and movement, words are still the most important ingredient for effective Readers Theatre; words interpreted by sensitive, expressive readers (Coger and White 26). Because movement and set are minimal, Readers Theatre encourages audience participation at a higher intellectual and emotional level.

### Eye Focus

An important part of Readers Theatre is offstage eye focus. Conventional theatre uses onstage focus, where the characters usually talk to one another as in a conversation. This takes the scene out of the audience's imagination and places it on the stage. Occasionally conventional theatre may also use offstage focus. Readers Theatre is presentational, so the focus of the characters is offstage. The characters do not look at each other, as in conventional theatre, but visualize their characters above the audience. The performers visualize themselves forward above the audience, and the other characters are visualized in relative positions.

The reason for this unusual focus is to signify the non-realistic nature of the performance. The cast members are not the characters, but interpreters bringing the words and actions alive for the audience who, in turn, are expected to see the action in their imagination. Considering this aspect, the audience watching a presentational performance must concentrate more fully than is usually required in representational theatre.

Offstage focus means that even though readers stand side by side, they converse with each other by looking into the middle of the audience, so their lines of vision intersect slightly above the heads of the listeners. As each reader describes action and events, the characters and events take place at this focal point. As a result, the listeners are in the middle of the action and must depend on imagination to see and understand the action. This unusual form of focus must be rehearsed carefully, so the readers maintain the narrative by focusing on the person they are addressing.

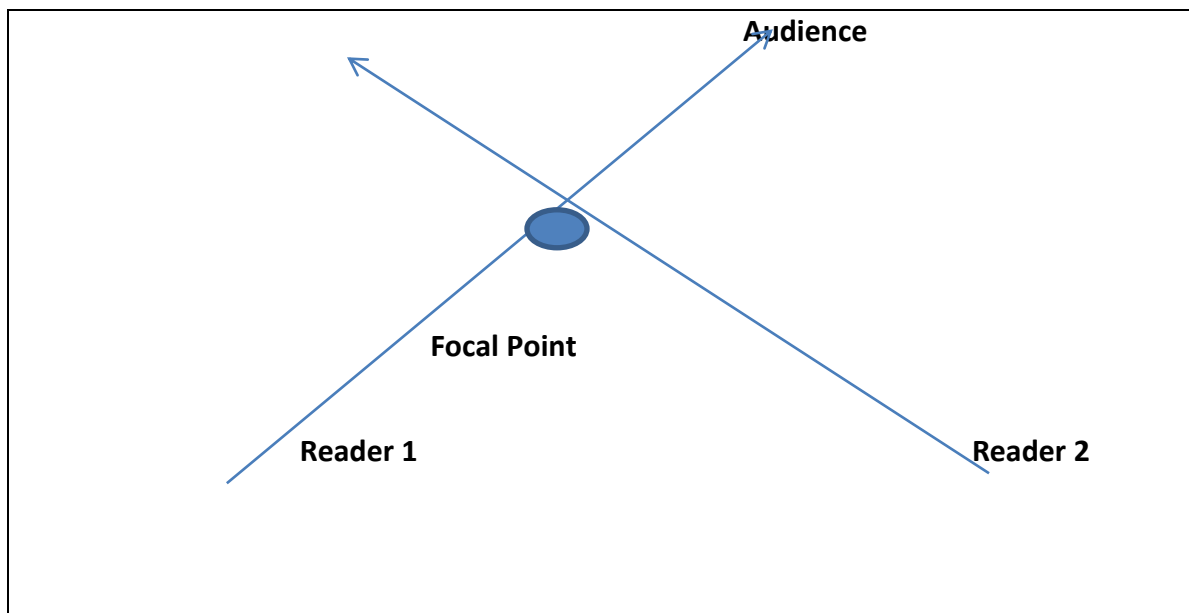


Figure 1: Two readers offstage focus

Source: Adams, William. *Institute Book of Readers Theatre*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 2003. Print.

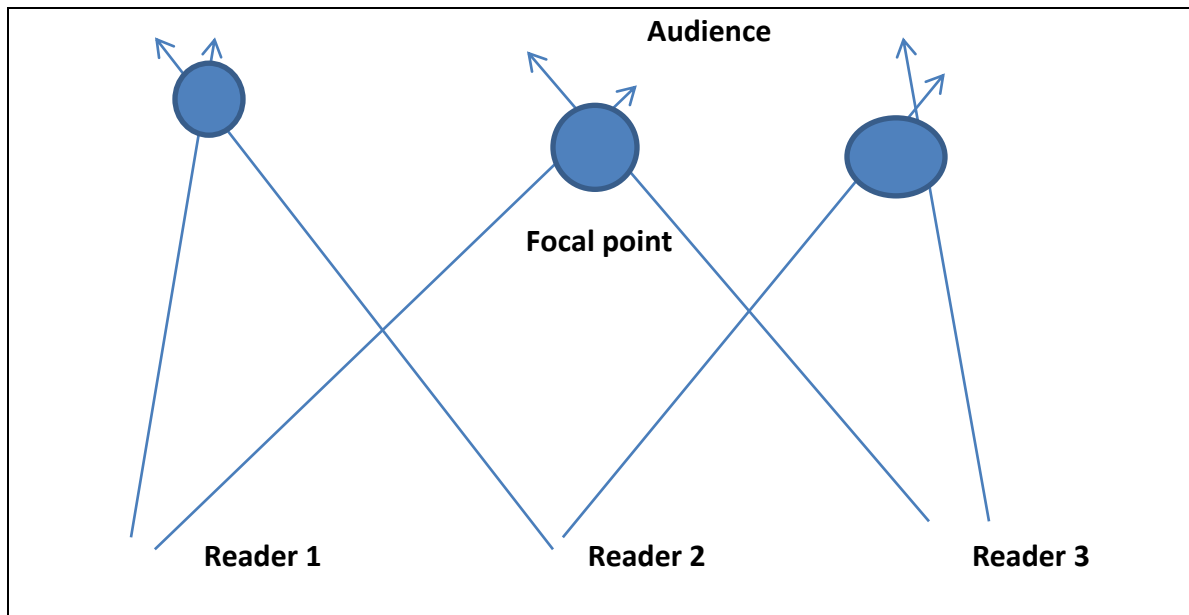


Figure 2: More than two readers offstage focus.

Source: Adams, William. *Institute Book of Readers Theatre*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 2003. Print.

### Writing the Script

Conventional theatre presents drama written in dialogue intended for the stage. Readers Theatre presents material not originally written for performance: novels, stories, poems, essays, journals, letters or whatever a writer wishes to adapt. Dr. Stump, University of Southern Maine, maintains that anything that is written can be adapted for Readers Theatre. He proved it to us by having his team perform an adaption of the directions and information on the back of a package of seeds, specifically a package of wild flowers. Although certainly not great literature, the

performance was funny, and we actually learned quite a bit, after all, who actually reads the back of a package of seeds!

#### Fundamentals of Script Writing:

- A script should be based on material of literary value. Because Readers Theatre is presentational, the focus is on what is spoken as well as what is seen.
- The script maker must respect the text and preserve the author's intentions as fully as possible.
  - Material should be arranged for performance, not adapted into a play by rewriting the narration into dialogue. Verb tenses should be retained; pronouns should also remain the same.
  - Point of view is extremely important. Point of view is reflected in the narration. To create a script with variety, the narration can be divided; the narrators of a selection are storytellers for specific characters, or groups.
  - Cutting should be held to a minimum that the performance situation will allow. ("He said," She replied angrily") can be removed from prose but not poetry as it will interrupt the verse. Avoid cutting within a line in order to preserve the style of the author's writing.
  - Distribution of parts should be approximately equal. Characters may share words and phrases within a sentence of narration.



- It is not necessary to have a different narrator for each character.

One narrator may narrate for the main character and another narrator may represent the rest of the cast.

The next step in writing the script is selecting and arranging the material. The criterion for selecting material is basic. Is the material appropriate for the cast and audience? Does it have literary value, and is it relevant to the audience?

### Choice of Material and Style

After taking several continuing education classes studying the lives of the pioneers and the Native Americans, I realized how many of these stories would lend themselves to Readers Theatre; I started writing scripts using historical events and themes. I also realized how many of our students were really quite unaware of the importance and the richness of history, particularly the history of our own state and culture. Being of the “technological” age, many young students do not know or understand the difficult lives of the people (their ancestors) who settled this area, nor do they know much about the history of the Native American people. I read several books, journals and diaries and decided the information could be adapted into a Readers Theatre format and performed. So, I wrote *Voices of the Prairie*, which is a series of vignettes portraying the experiences of both women settlers and Native American women.

I had about twenty books, diaries and journals covering the topics.

First I had to eliminate a few sources, and then I narrowed my topic to women settlers and Native American women. I narrowed my sources to nine, four about Native American Life and five about settler's lives. My goal was to write a script that would realistically tell the stories of their lives. I wanted the script to be balanced in presenting the point of view of both cultures: Native women and settler women. I wanted the narration to present their courage in enduring so many hardships, but also to present the lighter side of their lives; what they did for fun. The daily lives of Native women and Settler women demonstrated the sameness and the differences in the cultures.

Since Readers Theatre normally uses the narrative from published materials, it is mandatory to respect copyright laws. Several of my sources gave permission by e-mail or a phone call, but a few sources requested a written contract giving me permission to use their material. I wrote a contract which both the original writers and I signed giving me permission to use their work. One writer requested a script and a program be sent to her.

### Types of Readers Theatre

After I had permission to use copyrighted materials, I began to write the script. I had to choose a style to present the script, as Readers Theatre can be presented in three different styles. It is the director's choice, remembering that the general principle of Readers Theatre in any style is to seek communication of the text with the simplest means.

#### A. Simple Readers Theatre

- The presentation of the script emphasizes interpretation of the text through thought, emotion and experience. This has very limited physical movement. Scripts are used with offstage focus. Therefore, this style has the least external style (the least use of conventional theatre techniques).

#### B. Staged Readers Theatre

- An intermediate style that has a formal setup, but uses some external action with characters on revolving stools and narrators situated at music stands. Scripts are used, although it can be memorized, but the readers retain the script to emphasize the importance of the text in Readers Theatre.
- Scripts may also be used to suggest props (a plate, an offering)
- Gestures and mime are permitted also with offstage focus.

#### C. Chamber Theatre

- Simple structures are used as needed
- In some productions, the full physical resources of theatre (lighting, scenery, costumes, make-up, props, and sound) are used.
- Scripts ordinarily are not used, although narrators may carry them.

- The narrators use audience focus, supplemented with onstage focus to observe the characters.
- The characters use both onstage focus and offstage focus.
- Full stage actions may be performed.

Since I had already incorporated minimal set, sound, lights, costumes and visuals on a screen using Power Point, I chose to use the Chamber Theatre style. Technically it was not totally Chamber Theatre, but actually a mix of staged and Chamber Theatre. The readers kept their scripts but otherwise used Chamber Theatre style.

Readers Theatre can generally be ready in less time than a conventional play, and since I did not require my cast to memorize the script, rehearsal went quickly. We rehearsed for three weeks five times a week, for about three hours each rehearsal. My students had never done Readers Theatre before, so we spent some time learning what it is and how it is different from conventional theatre.

## CHAPTER II

### TRANSFERING LITERATURE TO READERS THEATRE

The task of transferring the stories to a script meant for performance was the most difficult and time consuming part of the project. I had to choose which stories would be included and how they would be organized. Since one of my goals was to show the differences and the sameness of each culture, I had to choose events and traditions which were significant in both cultures. In my research I identified several events or “happenings” that were significant to all women of the prairie: the difficulty creating a home and providing food for their family, the fear and loneliness experienced, the constant battle with the elements, the danger of childbirth, and the fear of children dying from disease or accidents. These were the common threads for the women of both cultures.

When the script was finished, the plans for production began. I had to decide how many readers were needed, and how many of each gender since many stories needed men as well as women. The set and platforms for levels needed to be designed and built and I had to choose the theatrical conventions (if any) I felt appropriate to use. Finally rehearsals began, but some time had to be spent acquainting students with this

genre of theatre, I arranged time to teach them the basic skills of Readers Theatre before we started rehearsals.

In this chapter I will explain why I chose the stories that are included, why I placed them in that order, and why I chose to use the theatrical conventions I incorporated. I will then explain the rehearsal process and evaluate the finished production.

### Selecting the Stories

Selecting the stories to include in the script was difficult and extremely time consuming. I had so much good material that it was a painful challenge to decide what must be cut so the length of the performance would be one hour plus fifteen or twenty minutes. I knew I was embarking on a grand task to choose and organize the material in that time frame.

The first common denominator of each culture, I believe, was their relationship with the land, the prairie. The land was like a character in their lives, a character that could be generous and breathtaking, but could quickly turn vicious and hostile. I chose to begin the production with a description of the "Native Prairie," using a voice off stage. Slides of prairie scenes were projected on a screen along with sounds of the prairie: birds, insects, and wind.

Recordings of the Native American flute were used between some segments, not only to indicate a change but to establish a mood. The sound of the traditional Native

flute is haunting and melancholy, peaceful but sharp. This music along with slides and other sound effects created a mood to tie in with the story. In some cases, sound effects, the music and the slides helped to present the land, as a main character, the force which initiated the action.

After determining the first common denominator, I found seven more experiences that seemed common to all the women. These experiences were in all the journals and diaries written by the immigrant women, and also were found in the legends told by the Native Americans. These stories were told again and again just with different people and sometimes different outcomes. I organized these seven common experiences in an order I felt was logical.

- The fear and loneliness experienced
- The types of dwellings they endured
- The constant battle with the elements
  - Bitter cold and blizzards
  - Prairie fires
  - Mosquitos and other types of insects and varmints
- The constant search for and preparation of food
- Marriage and children
- Childbirth
- The good times
  - Dances

- Picnics
- Holiday celebrations
- Box socials

I chose to end with the social “fun” experiences shared by each culture. Life was harsh and difficult, but they found ways to forget that for a while and enjoy one another’s company.

I sorted the stories into these groups, and carefully chose the ones I would ultimately use, and began the process of highlighting the narrative with different colors to indicate changes of readers. This is really the artistic part of the procedure, as assigning different readers to share the same story or paragraph, determines the flow of the narrative. Changing readers gives the audience variety in interpretation and position on stage. For example, at the very beginning of my script, the readers were describing the land and the life they lived. I wanted the narrative to be quick and alternate between the immigrants and the Native Americans. Assigning one or two sentences or even one or two words per reader, moved the action and allowed almost all the readers to have a description or two. Moving from person to person and, in this case, also from stage left to stage right several times, fixed the idea of common experiences in the cultures.

I organized the material in a series of vignettes, each vignette depicting one of the seven common threads identified. I alternated the vignettes from the Native point of view to the immigrant point of view, explaining the primitive living conditions, the



horrible, sometimes deadly winters, and the prairie fires that consumed everything in their path. The women described the long days of hard work, the heartbreak of losing children to disease, and the pain and danger of childbirth. These events were experienced by all the women of the prairie. So many stories were told that one of my most difficult tasks was deciding which story to include and which story to leave out. As the script evolved, it seemed the course of the lives of Native and immigrant women were more alike than different.

With so many sources, and great stories, I found myself rewriting and reorganizing many times. However, my basic organization remained the same: beginning with the land, which was their first common denominator, then stories of the harshness of life on the prairie, and finally, stories of the good times, the music, dances and picnics enjoyed by both cultures. After showing the experiences of the good times, I wanted the final scene to go back to the common denominator of the prairie itself and how it influenced their lives.

I had to find transitions between the vignettes that would make it clear where the action was moving. I decided to use sound effects, music and slides projected on a screen that hung in the center of the stage separating the two cultures. I used Native American flute music to make the transitions from the settlers to the Indian camps, and I found short clips of American folk music of the era to make the transitions to the immigrant stories.

## Choosing Theatrical Conventions

Sound effects: birds singing, bugs chirping, and blizzard winds howling, were some of the sounds used as transitions, but they also highlighted the natural environment of the prairie. The sound effects and the visuals, along with the dialogue, helped establish the “character” of the environment. The harsh environment played an instrumental role in the lives of those who lived here; the sound effects and the visual images, established the importance of that environmental character. The sound of raging blizzard winds along with the images of the cold barren land, or snow drifts covering an entire house, enhanced the narrative and gave the audience a more defined picture of the hostile environment.

The script began with the universality of the importance of the land; the land was an integral part of those who lived here. They depended on the land for everything, but they also knew that the spirits of the land were fickle, and could turn on them at any time. When I began to write the ending, I wanted to return to idea that the land was part of their identity, that it shaped these women and made them stronger. I combined parts from immigrant diaries and Native American legends to illustrate how these women were made stronger by being part of the prairie, and that the women of both cultures were honorable, resourceful, and respected.

## Staging

The stage was divided in two parts, using minimal set pieces to indicate the Native Americans on one side and the immigrants on the other side. Our technical director at Lake Region created a simple minimal set that symbolized the two cultures in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. On stage left was the frame of a teepee; on stage right a dilapidated fence with horse equipment hanging from it. Small platforms of different levels were placed down stage of the teepee and the fence. These simple set pieces established boundaries for each group and immediately identified who was speaking. A screen was hung center stage where pictures related to each theme were projected.

The lights were set to light half the stage, so when one group was talking the other group was dark. Spotlights were used in a few scenes when one character was emphasized. Occasionally the entire stage was lit, but usually half was dark.

The use of costumes became a bit complicated. Finding a few costumes for the settlers was easily done; we found period costumes for both the men and the women in our costume room, but costumes for the Native Americans were more difficult. Native costumes are more complicated, and since a few of my readers were not Native, I was reluctant to dress them in Native American clothing. I made the decision to dress the readers for the Native characters in black, the traditional color for Readers Theatre. If I had this performed again, I think I would make a concerted effort to find more Indian readers, and then I would feel more comfortable using the costumes.

Readers Theatre can generally be ready for performance in less time than a conventional play, and since I did not require my cast to memorize the script, rehearsals went quickly. We rehearsed for three weeks five times a week, for two to three hours each rehearsal. My students had never done Readers Theatre before, so we spent some time learning what it is and how it is different from conventional theatre. Those who were experienced as actors were at first confused about keeping their script, and actually didn't believe me, but they happily accepted, as they realized they didn't have to memorize their parts. However, it was made clear that they had to be extremely familiar with their lines in order to interpret and focus. The audience members must always be able to see the eyes of the reader, so looking at their script must be done quickly.

The actual logistics of readers holding their scripts was difficult at first because holding a regular sized three-ring- binder while reading and executing some movement was difficult. The script had to be small enough to hold in one hand, the font needed to be large enough to easily read, and the pages had to be organized to make turning pages easy and efficient. Many versions were tried until we found the right format that worked for all readers.

Most of the readers had only participated in conventional theatre, so they were unfamiliar with offstage focus. It took several rehearsals before they were totally comfortable with not looking at one another. I had to constantly remind them to focus offstage. I indicated a specific spot on the wall in the auditorium and stopped them if

they took their eyes off it. They eventually understood the concept and were able to usually keep their offstage focus. When actors are used to looking at one another and playing off each other, visualizing the action offstage is difficult at first. Most of the actors finally figured out the concept, but a few struggled with this all the way through performance.

Just because we started rehearsals did not mean that script writing was finished. After a few days of rehearsal, I realized the script was too long. I did not wish to have an intermission, but rather have the production finished in one act. It was painful, but I had to cut a few scenes, and finally the script was within the time limit I wanted, which was between sixty and ninety minutes.

### Assessment

The production ran for two nights. I was pleased with the number of people who attended; since this is an art form that not many are familiar with, I did not expect huge audiences. The audience members were very complimentary about the student's performance and the script.

One of my goals for the entire project was to arouse the curiosity of younger generations. I have observed that many do not know much about how their ancestors lived in this part of the country. Several young people had many questions about the lives of these women, and a few could hardly believe the experiences they endured. Those older members of the audience understood and identified with the characters as

they had heard their parents or grandparents tell the same stories. Many particularly spoke about the blizzards, and the amount of work that was expected of the children. Many lingered after the performance and shared their stories with one another.

Another of my goals was to introduce the community and my students to the genre of Readers Theatre. Many audience members commented that they were intrigued by the genre and enjoyed how it was presented. Several indicated they liked the simplicity of the production, and they felt it lent itself to this type of topic.

Even after a successful performance, it is easy to find those parts that would be nice to change. This project was no different. For the most part, I was happy with the script, but if performed again, I will cut some of the longer narratives. The narrative of the woman that won the writing contest for the *Dakota Farmer* was too long. I divided it between three readers, which helped, but I think cutting more and substituting some narratives that I cut earlier may be better.

I wanted to keep each half of the stage separate throughout the production to indicate the two separate cultures. However, towards the second half of the production I moved some of the immigrant's narratives to the Native side of the stage. I did this because most of the narratives at the end were from the immigrant's point of view. Using stage left, over and over again, became a problem, so I blocked a few characters on the Native platforms. Watching it on the video made me realize this was confusing and just didn't seem consistent. I think the best way to rectify that problem is change the script a bit so some of those narratives are done at a different time.

I thought my students did a good job with their roles. Some gave into the temptation to see who was in the audience rather than keep their focal point, but it wasn't too noticeable. Using microphones is always a problem because inevitably one or more will not work correctly, or more often, the technician in the booth misses a cue.

I believe I accomplished my artistic and educational goals in writing and directing this production. The audience enjoyed the production and many were impressed with the art form of Readers Theatre and would like to see a production again. My students also had positive comments about the experience. They said the hardest part for them was holding the script and not losing their places. They were more used to conventional theatre, so for some of them, using the techniques of oral interpretation was a big hurdle. They wanted more freedom to move, and were not used to depending on the words and the interpretation of those words, to convey meaning.

As an educator I was very happy with the outcomes of the production. The students became acquainted with Readers Theatre and liked it. Reading and studying these narratives created an interest in finding out more about their own backgrounds. The students sometimes found the stories hard to believe, and they had a new respect for those who lived during that time. I reached my goal and objective showing the use of Readers Theatre as an educational tool. After reading and performing this script my students were curious and motivated to learn more.

VOICES OF THE PRAIRIE  
READERS THEATRE ADAPTION  
BY  
JEANETTE KENNER

Stage will be divided in two separate areas using platforms and lighting. One area will be for the Native American scenes and the other for the Settler's scenes. Some readers will be characters that will enter and exit. Computer images will be projected on a scrim upstage.

**Narrator over microphone – stage is dark with projections and sound effects**

Native prairie once stretched for hundreds of miles across the middle section of our country, covering nearly a quarter of the lower 48 states. Prairie supported an enormous variety of plant and animal life, including large herds of bison, pronghorn, elk, plains grizzlies, and wolves. The wild prairie inhabitants thrived with wildfires, grazing, drought, heat and cold.

Native 1 (F)

Those who always lived here respected the land and lived in harmony with it.

Native 2 (M)

Men and warriors fought and defended the prairie for their families and their survival.



Settler 1 (M)

Those who came and settled found the land was sometimes cruel, but they too, wished to live in harmony with the land.

Native 4 (F)

The women were the heart of this land –

Native 5 (F)

Native and

Settler2 (F)

Immigrant –

Settler 2 (F)

Making and keeping their homes, experiencing and enduring the wonder, the abundant riches, and the occasional cruelty of this huge land.

Settler 4 (F)

Traveling far from their native countries, bringing very few possessions with them.

Settler 3 (M)

They came with a dream of a better life – but endured and fought life threatening obstacles.

Settler 5 (F)

Blizzards, hail, heat

Settler 1 (M)

Prairie fires, insects, wild animals

Settler 4 (F)

Disease, childbirth, loneliness

Settler 2 (F)

They came to live off the land, build new homes and new lives.

Native 2 (M)

They came to live amongst those who were already here.

**Native flute music**

**Visual of camps and women**

Native 1 (F)

Gatherer, planter, harvester,

Native 4 (F)

Cook, tanner, tailor,

Native 5 (F)

Potter, weaver, and home builder –

Native 1 (F)

The early American Indian woman filled all these roles as she transformed the bounty of Mother Earth into the products she and her family needed for survival.

Native 3 (M)

While the man was the hunter and the warrior,

Native 4 (F)

An Indian woman's activities were turned to the conservation of life. As she wandered the countryside gathering the seeds, roots, and fruits of the land,

Native 4 (F)

As she labored in her garden, coaxing the plants to grow, and as she provided clothing and shelter for her family, she felt her oneness with the earth,

Native 1 (F)

And her constant concern with growth and life reinforced her unity with the womanly principles of universal motherhood.

Native 2 (M)

The Indian woman rarely had an official voice in tribal affairs, but she exercised almost complete control in her own sphere ---

Native 4 (F)

The home. The wife controlled the family food supply.

Native 5 (F)

Her housekeeping duties were simple. Sweeping the floor, straightening the blankets, and scrubbing one or two pots was pretty much the extent of housecleaning.

Native 3 (M)

Of course, she often had to build the dwelling--

Native 1 (f)

be it skin tipi, grass hut, or adobe house --

Native 4 (f)

Once a tipi was made it was the responsibility and property of the woman.

Native 5 (F)

She manufactured every item she used --- horn spoons, baskets, pots,

Native 1 (F)

needles, woodenware, and clothing.

Native 4 (F)

Yet her major tasks still revolved around providing food for her family.

Native 1 (F)

A woman living in a Great Plains tribe spent most of her time during the height of the buffalo culture, dealing with the enormous amount of meat and hides her husband provided.

Native 3 (M)

Fifteen to twenty-five Indian hunters could kill about one thousand buffalo in a fall season; that meant about fifty head for each woman.

Native 5 (F)

A woman with average skill could dress a hide in about three days.

Native 3 (M)

This meant a woman could tan about twenty robes a season in addition to other household duties, which included processing a great deal of meat. It took the labor of more than two women to process the meat and hides provided by one hunter.

Native 2 (M)

A whole buffalo cow yielded fifty-five pounds of pemmican and forty-five pounds of dried meat.

Native 3 (M)

The women were also in charge of tanning the hides of the animals killed.

Native 1 (F)

The hides that were tanned with the hair on, were ready to be used as bedding

Native 5 (F)

While others could be fashioned into various articles of clothing.

Native 1 (F)

Buffalo horns became ladles and spoons.

Native 4 (F)

And when the robes were tanned, painted and worked with dyed quills or trade beads, the finest one of all was taken to the top of a hill and left there as a gift of gratitude offered to their brother, the buffalo.

Reader 3 (M)

Because so many of the buffalo's relations had died to feed his Indian brother, the Indian, in his turn, would die and feed the grasses.

Native 2 (M)

To the Sioux, not only the honor but the very existence of the tribe lay in the moccasin tracks of their women.

Native 5 (F)

The work of the Indian woman was necessary for survival. A lazy woman put her family in jeopardy.

Native 2 (M)

The Story of the Lazy Woman

**Readers 1 and 4 step off platform**

Native 4 (F)

Once there lived a mother and a daughter who were both rather lazy. Neither of them was a bad woman, but they always felt that if they could get someone else to do their work for them, so much the better.

Native 1 (F)

It came to pass that the daughter married and according to the custom moved to live near her husband's family. All summer long she had a gay time and did not work. When people asked her why she wasn't preparing for winter she replied,

Native 5 (F)

"Oh, mother always does that for me."

Native 4 (F)

The mother likewise was not working.

Native 1 (F)

She assumed her daughter was working for both of them.

Native 5 (F)

When winter came it was a year of famine.

Native 3 & 4 (together)

These two women were the first to die.

**flute music**

**Move to the settler side of stage**

**Projections on screen of prairie**



Settler 1 (M)

The native prairie was beautiful and fruitful.

Settler 4 (F)

“The Lands of North Dakota lie flat,

Settler 2 (M)

stretching under broad horizons and expansive skies,

Settler 3 (M)

boasting of long, summer days and cold winters. Native grasses common to the plains  
rippled in the winds.

Settler 4 (F)

The seasons came and went with good years and bad, a true test of faith for those living  
on the prairie.

Settler 1 (M)

In 1863, the government gave any person 21 years or older, who was the head of a  
family;

Settler 3 (M)

either citizen or alien, who intended to become a citizen,

Settler 2 (F)

160 acres of land. The title to the land was granted after living on the land for five years,

Settler 1 (M)

providing they made improvements.

Settler 3 (M)

Advertisements calling for homesteaders were written in many languages

**Norwegian ad – spoken over microphone backstage, image on screen**

Settler 2 (F)

For the first time, women were allowed to file land claims as heads of households.

Settler 1 (M)

– February 24, 1882 edition of the *Hillsboro Banner* encouraged a specific type of woman to move to Dakota Territory.

Settler 3 (M)

Young women wanted. This territory is the place for young women. Not the worthless substitute which comes ready-made from the band of the fashionable milliner and dress-maker, and does nothing for this world but study the fashion, read novels, gossip, and spend the money they never earn or help earn; but earnest, industrious, ambitious,

young women who are willing to work and make themselves useful. There is a scarcity of such young women here, and of those who have come, nearly all have married since their arrival.

### **The journey to Dakota Territory - visuals on screen**

#### Settler 1 (M)

Terkel Fuglestad and his wife Abigal, lived in a mountain town on the west coast of Norway. With no prospect of acquiring the family's farm or of finding employment in a depressed Norwegian economy, the young Norwegian couple struck out for the prairies of Dakota.

#### Terkel Fuglestad

In 1883 my wife Abigal and I packed our clothes and set sail for America. It was God's will; the only way was to set my course westward across the ocean heading for the Dakota prairies. After fourteen days on the steamship from Rotterdam, Holland, we arrived in New York.

#### Abigal Fuglestad

Our route went through the Great Lakes from Buffalo to Duluth and took about a week. We traveled as freight goods. We had our bedding with, and at night we made our bed under deck among piles of freight goods. On the other side of the deck were fourteen milk cows in rows. We were a flock of Finlanders, three Norwegians and one Swede.

Terkel

After a month's journey, we reached Valley City, Dakota Territory. There I met my brother-in-law, E. Aarestad.

Abigal

The next day we followed the train as far as the rails were built, two miles north of the present Hannaford. We unloaded the provisions on the prairie near the Hetland farm where men were working on the rails. One of them had oxen with and drove us two miles to Aarestad's homestead. At last we came to our destination where our future home was to be.

Terkel

I hadn't been on the Dakota prairies very long before I felt the urge to hunt. I had taken with me from Norway a small gun, and not far from Jens Bull's place there was a pond where ducks were floating around. There was high grass around, and all of a sudden I saw a pretty animal with a bush tail and white stripes on its back. I ran after it but very soon had to retrace my steps. The air was full of choking smell. It followed along with me. I had barely stepped inside the door when I heard the cry

Abigal

Out! Out!

Terken

They threw some clothes out to me and ordered

Abigal

Bury those clothes you have on!

Terkel

This was a new adventure for me. In my childhood days I had read in *Nature's History* of the stenkdyne (skunk) on the American prairies. It now became clearer to me, having experienced it. What did we think of America? Oh, we thought it quite interesting and romantic and felt at home. And my wife? Yes it was just one time she lost her courage in all these years following my hunting experience. I came and there she stood, looking very downcast. She pointed to the sod house and said,

Abigal

Look what people have to live in. If we had money, I'd go back home right away."

Terkel

And she meant it. She came from a rich home in Norway where there was luxury, not making this very inviting. But then we visited some neighbors down by the Sheyenne River, and there she met some acquaintance from her neighborhood in Norway. These neighbors had been here about two years and had things quite comfortable. Her courage returned and from then on she has been quite satisfied.

### Mable Mittlestedt

Matilda Haerter Mittelstedt, along with her husband and daughter Lillian, came from Ukraine. Their first ship ran into a sandbar near Copenhagen, Denmark. They found themselves in Liverpool, England, where lodging was a cheap hotel overriden with bedbugs. When they finally set sail, the seas were extremely rough. Lillian who was not yet two years old, became very ill. Their ship landed in Quebec instead of New York where they were quarantined until Lillian either got better or died. Unfortunately, Lillian died. Her parents continued their journey to North Dakota on the train.

### Odel Olson

My mother came on a ship and when it was half ways across, it lost its anchor and started taking water. They couldn't get out into lifeboats, but they had signaled with flags to a steamer – a cattle steamer – an empty cattle steamer going through there. And they signaled to them that they were in distress and they signaled back to put their lifeboats down and get as many of them – women and children in the first boats, and take them across to the cattle steamer. And then next they took the older men, and so forth, and got all of them across without even one of them drowning. And the next day they could see the ship that they were coming in was hanging at a list and within a few hours it went down. And my mother, all she was allowed to take on this ship was a little money and a few handkerchiefs. And that's all she brought to this country.

Settler 3 (M)

The *Carrington Weekly Independent* magazine supplement of April 22, 1909 highlighted the call of the west.

Settler 4 (f)

“Dakota as Seen by a Woman.”

Zerlina S. Eakin

Gentlemen: I have watched the country develop from a trackless, uninhabited prairie into a well settled community – the beautiful farms and substantial buildings thereon giving indisputable evidence of the prosperity of those who came and stayed by North Dakota “for better, for worse.” And in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases it has been “for better.”

Coming from Hancock County, Illinois, (one of the garden spots of that state) to Dakota in 1882 and filing on a homestead in Foster County the following year, I endured most of the hardships that fall to the pioneer. But nothing in my experience in those early years caused my faith in North Dakota’s future greatness to waver for one moment, and subsequent years have but confirmed my early opinion.

And now, neither beautiful Illinois nor sunny southern Texas, where I resided a year and a half, possess attractions sufficient to cause me to renounce North Dakota unless I

could carry with me her gifts of health and prosperity and the wonderful, bracing air that simply makes existence a pleasure.

Signed: Zerlina S.Eakin - former County Supt. of Schools, Carrington, ND

#### Settler 5

Personal letters were highly valued and anticipated, letters from the settlers to their families back home

#### Settler 3

letters from those who moved ahead of their families, to make a claim and prepare a place for their families to come...

### **Letters from Dakota Territory**

Mary Larrabee

Dakota Territory, August, 1876

Dear Patty,

As last after traveling by rail, prairie schooner and ox team, we arrived at Fort Totten to find that William's trial for desertion was on, and he was found guilty and sentenced to two years in federal prison. We got his sentence changed to ten years of life on the prairie; so my dear we will not see you for ten years.



General L. C. Hunt is in command at Fort Totten and last winter several cavalry regiments were quartered here. We have just received word that Custer and the L Troops of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry were all massacred June 20, 1876. This was one of the regiments quartered here last winter. We are all feeling frightened and dismayed about it. The Indians are restless and dissatisfied, and are feeling very much elated over their victory.

Mary Larrabee

Pierce

July 6, 1879

Dear Wife,

I now seat myself to pen you a few lines. It is Sunday morning and a lovely day it is. I was in hopes you would get here toward the last of July, for I want to get me a team so that I can do something on my land without hiring. Our potatoes and beans are looking very nice. We do not have very solid food, no potatoes, no butter; we have gooseberry sauce and bread and milk, but we will soon have plenty of potatoes. There was two young men here yesterday looking at land, they came back last night, will remain over Sunday with us. We are going to be cutting hay this week. Abbot and I have agreed to cut seven tons for some men that are coming this fall from Missouri. They want the hay to winter the stock that they will bring with them. One of them has 100 acres of wheat to harvest at home, and then he will get married and bring his bride to Dakota. I hope

you will get here in time to dry some of the gooseberries. I never saw such nice ones and so many. You must be sure to buy your ticket from St. Paul to Tower City, and if we are not there when you arrive, you can stay at the hotel. If I get the letter soon enough, I will be there to meet you. Do not go to Valley City, for it is all filled up with people from Norway.

Your loving Husband, Pierce. Good-bye.

Mary Larabee

Dakota Territory, Sept. 1876

Dear Patty,

A beautiful September day and at last we have left the post and are settled on the Fort Totten trail about thirty miles from Fort Totten. Let me describe our surroundings. To the east lies Lake Belland, a nice sheet of water with a few trees on the north and south Shores. On the south and north the hills shut off the view. The river runs out of the valley to the west. Mr. Larrabee is very busy making hay and getting in supplies. The relay station will use up huge quantities of this, for all the supplies freighted to Fort Totten and the Indian Agency go by our door along this trail. Herds of antelope pass near, grazing as they go, for in this valley is fine grass and running water, which is not often to be found, for you may travel miles upon the prairie without finding water. The geese and ducks and prairie chickens are here in immense numbers and sometimes they cover vast spaces. The sand hill cranes look at a distance like huge herds of cattle.

We have no neighbors nearer than Fort Totten except the Indians, who visit us frequently, and so far as I know, I am the only white woman in Foster County. We have a new baby at our house, a boy, which we have named Berkley Terry Larrabee, whose arrival on the 12<sup>th</sup> was very much dreaded by me because we had no doctors or nurses. This baby so far as we know is the first white child born in Foster County.

Mary Larrabee

Pierce

June 29, 1879

Dear wife,

I went down to the creek this morning and shot a fish and caught another in my hands that weighed 2 pounds. I went to Valley City to get me a scythe and swath and fork for we are going to be cutting hay. We came past way back in the night and never in all my life saw so many mosquitoes. I bought a yard of net to cover my face, If I had not, I could not have stood it for the wind did not blow one breath, and the oxen were covered and nearly wild. The folks where we stopped said they had never seen the mosquitoes so bad.

Your loving husband, Pierce

**Building a home**

**Music and/or visuals**

Settler 1 (M)

When people homesteaded their first thoughts were of shelter, food, and water, but often times they built shelter for their farm animals first,

Settler 3 (M)

as human survival depended on them.

Settler 1 (M)

Depending on what was available, different types of homes were built on the plains.

Settler 2 (F)

log houses,

Settler 4 (F)

sod houses

Settler 5 (F)

and shacks,

Settler 1 (m)

Claim shacks were the humble beginning of most prairie homes. These were simply a room framed with lumber and covered with tar paper. Ella Rapp Gibbings describes the claim shack where she was born in Callahan Township.

Ella

Three shelves or boards nailed in the corner wall by the door for dishes. A bed, old black stove, small homemade table, two old chairs without backs, and no dresser (a wash tub was used for a dresser and pushed under bed.) Two little barn windows to let daylight in and a homemade door.

Settler 2 (F)

From the diary of Julia Carpenter Lamoure County, Dakota Territory, a few miles north of the Edgeley town site, 1882

Julia Carpenter

Our shanty was the first for miles; our nearest neighbor was fifteen or twenty miles. For a while we only had part of a roof and for two weeks no doors or windows. At night the mosquitoes were fearful beyond endurance. Nearly every night we had from one to four smudges. We all slept in our clothes. We went to Ellendale for supplies and after loading our wagon with lumber and supplies, we started for home. We were crossing a coulee and became stuck in the muddy bottom unable to go one way or another. We finally threw off a large part of the lumber and again started for home around one o'clock in the afternoon. The day was very warm and with the heavy load the mules could only walk. Scarcely the least breeze was felt, and the mosquitoes were more than ferocious. The distance from Ellendale to our land was some 30 miles, so we did not reach there until midnight. With all the pain I have suffered, I never endured such agony

as I did that night. The mosquitoes numbered millions. The coolies were full of them. I wore a broad brimmed hat with mosquito netting with rubber in the top and drawn around the hat and the lower part tucked in the ulster, but it seemed hardly the least protection. I was bitten over my whole body, not only through my gloves, but through three thickness, ulster, dress, and wrapper sleeves; the miserable insects even found a small hole in the side of my shoes. I was bitten from the soles of my feet to my waist in addition to hands, arms, neck, back, head and face, but what endured was nothing in comparison to what Frank went through, he having neither gloves, netting, or any protection. Every few minutes he would jump out of the wagon, slapping the mosquitoes off from the mules, whose sides were so covered with them that their color could not have been told. We feared momentarily the mules would refuse to travel. Each coolie we passed increased their numbers, and the evening brought them in myriads. Could we have driven fast, the little breeze thus produced would have made away with some of them. My dear Frank always so patient was almost wild, and he prayed aloud,

Frank

“O Lord, give us hail, give us rain, give us snow, give us anything - but take away these mosquitoes.”

Julia

We at last reached our home. The house was still only partly done, no roof, doors or

windows, and a partial floor. Frank had borrowed a tent, and as we entered it, I sank to the ground in exhaustion and immediately fell into a heavy sleep. I lay there until morning, with hat, dress, and gloves all on.

Settler 4 (F)

Diary entry of Julia Carpenter, Lamoure County Dakota Territory.

Julia

May 6: Freezing cold. Milk froze in cupboard, water in the pails, water froze by our bedside. We suffered with cold all day. I sat with my feet in the oven most of the day and bowed over the stove. Although we had a hot fire, the storm was so cold that my breath came out like smoke as often seen out of doors on cold winter mornings. Such is life in a Claim Shanty in the far west.

Settler 5 (F)

Sod houses, or soddies were made of the sod gathered when a plow was used to break the land. Not only was the sod free, but the settler created firebreaks to ward off prairie fires that were common on the plains.

Settler 2 (F)

The dirt floors inside a soddy were not popular with women.

Settler 4 (F)

The roofs of soddies leaked after rainstorms. It was said if it rained outside one day; it rained two days inside the house.

Settler 5 (F)

Soddies were warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Care was taken not to heat them too warmly in winter,

Settler 2 (F)

as wild animals would crawl into the house to warm up.

Settler 1 (M)

Some lived in granaries, which normally stored grain. Golda Reid's first house was not fancy.

Golda Reid

It was an old granary, one room which was large enough for a bed, table, and chairs, and a cook stove which furnished the heat for the room until our first baby came along, and then we added another small room.

Settler 4 (F)

Some families like that of Mary Miller's lived in buildings constructed for livestock.



### Mary

We built a barn and a shed and we lived in that little shed [built into the side of the barn] for the summer, cooking there and eating there and washing clothes. The children all slept upstairs and my father and mother slept in the chicken coop, and finally they got a baby so that chicken coop grew too!

### Settler 5 (F)

Many families had to live together in small shacks and sometimes even share the home with farm animals. Rachel Bella Calof – Dakota Territory 1894

### Rachel

In an instant the happiness of my marriage turned to bitterness. The knowledge that I was to spend my honeymoon in a tiny space shared with three strangers was more than I could bear. The furniture and arrangement in Abe's and my home was the usual. Two beds, one belonging to my father and mother-in-law and the other for Abe and me, were hammered to a wall. The remaining pieces of furniture were a short bench and the stove. The seating arrangement for meals called for one person on each of the beds while the other three would sit on the bench. We five people, however, were not to have such spacious quarters all to ourselves. At this time the in-laws had a flock of twelve chickens and Abe and I also had twelve. There was no outside coop for the poultry, but if there had been we would have lost the flock in short order because the temperature would soon be going to forty or more degrees below zero and the chickens

would have frozen to death. We needed to keep them alive in hopes of having their eggs as well as the meat later on. Each family was to keep its chickens under its bed and the ends and sides were closed off to form a cage. Also there was a calf which had to be accommodated inside. It occupied the remaining corner opposite Moses's sleeping space.

This is how five human beings and twenty-five animals faced the beginning of the savage winter of the plains in a twelve-by-fourteen-foot shack. This is how we lived and suffered. The chickens were generous with their perfumes and we withstood this, but the stench of the calf tethered in the corner was well-nigh intolerable.

#### Settler 2 (F)

Furnishings in most prairie homes were simple, created from materials on hand or those that could be easily obtained and then fashioned into usable items. Most pioneer accounts are matter of fact describing their small and meagerly furnished homes,--

#### Settler 3 (M)

but what was important to them as women - surfaces.

#### Settler 4 (F)

The house was pretty simple, but as I recall

#### Settler 4, 5, 2 together

We were happy, so I guess that's all that's necessary.

## **Music and visuals as transition**

### **Settler 1 (M)**

Every dwelling on the prairie had a stove, called a range. It was the most important part of any home. They were heated by fire and had to be lit every day before any food could be prepared.

### **Settler 2 (F)**

A task that often fell to the children in the family was that of finding fuel to burn in the range. Since much of North Dakota is not wooded, it was impossible to find an abundance of wood, so alternatives were needed. This is where Mother Nature helped. Anna Sorenson had the odorous task of picking cow chips.

### **Anna Sorenson (Child)**

In the early years, lots of times we'd run out of coal and we didn't have kindling so we'd use cow chips. We kids would be sent out in the pasture to get cow chips, and sometimes they were a little bit under-done and soft, and you'd have to tip them over with a stick and let them lay and dry for one more day. If they were really good and dry through and through, they made a roaring fire.

### **Settler 4 (F)**

Olivia Rhoads recalled how some German settlers created their coal for winter.

## Olivia Rhoads

Some of the German neighbors would make their own coal for winter by spreading manure on about a 15 foot square, putting water over this and use their horses to stomp it down, then another layer of manure and water: This they did until they had the amount needed. After this dried, it would be cut into squares to fit the stove. You could always tell who used “misch” [manure] to heat their homes, as clothes always carried the aroma.

## Settler 3 (M)

Providing and preparing food for families were just two of the many responsibilities of the women.

## Settler 2 (F)

Baking, gardening, preserving meat,

## Settler 4 (F)

Canning, gathering eggs, churning butter,

## Settler 5 (F)

carding and spinning wool,

## Settler 1 (M)

sewing and repairing clothes were all part of a woman's duties.

Settler 5 (F)

One of the primary foods found on tables at every meal was bread. Many diaries written by pioneer women speak of the importance of bread. Flour was a staple for pioneer families.

Settler 3 (M)

Many communities had their own flour mills. In the fall, farmers brought their wheat to the mill to be ground into flour. The mill ran non-stop for many days. Sixty pounds of wheat, made about 42 pounds of flour.

Settler 1 (M)

Florence Smith wrote:

Florence Smith

I used 100 pounds of flour every three weeks, baking nine loaves of bread daily for my family.

Settler 2 (F)

Adeline Herrick Alexander Lindsay arrived in Grand Forks in April 1878, accompanied by her family on their way to a claim near Minto. Adeline baked bread every day, making yeast from wild hops, which grew abundantly in their area.

Adeline

I baked bread every day -- about 12 or 14 loaves -- and such fine bread. I had six bachelors to bake for, beside people were commencing to come in the country in covered wagons, and as our house was the only one on the prairie, they naturally came to us.

Narrator 3 (M)

When the Railroad was being built 3 miles east of their farm, Adeline's bread-baking responsibilities grew.

Adeline-

When they were working 3 or 4 miles from us, some of the bosses came over to our place and asked me if I would bake some bread for them. I sure was happy to do so, and the result was I baked 30 or 40 loaves of bread every day for them. They came at noon and evening every day for bread.

Settler 4

It was important to never run out of bread; however

Carolina

I must tell you about one time when we ran out of bread and it was Saturday, so I said I would buy bread. My husband said.

Husband

go out the back door of the store where no one can see you **buying** bread!

Carolina

because this was shameful!

Settler 1 (M)

But, not all pioneer women knew how to bake bread.

Settler 5 (F)

Adell Grim King's first attempt with bread was such a failure she tearfully threw out the dough and then later found baby chicks stuck in it.

Settler 2 (F)

Alice McKay was 10, the oldest in the family, when her mother died.

Alice (child)

The first thing I had to learn was how to bake bread. My grandmother lived across the way. She came over and gave me lessons how to mix and bake bread. Well, I had spindly little arms and was just little and she was a large muscular woman and she'd say,

Grandmother

"Well, now, this is how you do it."

Alice

I attempted to make bread and my sister next to me [Clara] helped. Sometimes our bread would turnout pretty good and sometimes again it was very heavy. I realize now that it was the yeast probably more than anything that caused the difference... Apparently we had a lot of old yeast and our bread was almost inedible. I remember Papa saying.

Alice's dad

"I don't know what Alice did with the bread this time, but the dogs won't eat it."

Alice

Of course, I was embarrassed. When the neighbors came in we'd have coffee and bread and butter, if nothing else. Of course, bread was one of the most important items for lunch and if it didn't turn out good, it was sort of a disgrace to the family.

Settler 4 (F)

Farm homes had large gardens, as it was difficult to obtain produce by other means. The women learned how to store vegetables in a cellar. Beets and carrots were packed in crocks with sand and, along with potatoes, were eaten all winter.

Settler 5 (F)

Meat preservation was also necessary, bacon and ham were cured, and sausage was frozen. Pearl Wick wrote of how other meat was preserved before refrigerators.



Pearl

When we butchered my mother used to take the pork chops, fry them ready to eat, and then she'd pour the fat that she drained off the pork chops in a crock...then they'd put on a layer of pork chops, fry some more, pour the fat on, and another layer of pork chops. They'd have that jar filled with fried meat and the lard, well, that'd be poured over the top. When they wanted pork chops to eat they just dug down in that lard, took those out, and heated 'em. They were real good...the lard was kind of a preservative.

Settler 2 (F)

Churning butter took time and energy. Women quickly learned that they had to "burp" the churn or would clean up the mess when the cork would pop. According to Margaret Lien:

Margaret Lien

We got a barrel churn that you turned, but they were kind of wicked because if you got turning them and didn't hold them straight up and pull the cork in the cover and let the air out once in a while, the first thing you'd know, the cork would blow, and you'd have cream and everything all over the place.

Settler 4 (F)

The women sewed the family clothes by hand. Paulina Clark moved with her husband to Richland County in 1889. Her daughter remembers the task of sewing.

## Paulina

We did all of the family sewing by hand in the home. Mother did it all until the daughters were old enough to be taught how. She made dresses from dark brown and blue denim; each girl had only one new dress a season, and the dress from the season before was used as a second dress. The little girls wore aprons of bright prints to cover their dark dresses. The aprons were washed with the weekly wash, but the dresses were washed only every four or five weeks at the most. . The work clothes for men were many times made from sacks and shirts of denim, and they were handed down when they outgrew them They wore heavy shoes and home knitted socks. The underwear was made from red or blue flannel. The girls underskirts were many yards of flannel gathered on to a belt at the waistline, and for Sundays these dark flannel skirts were covered with white full skirts with yards of lace at the hem.

### **Transition music and/or visual**

#### Settler 1 (M)

*The Dakota Farmer* was a magazine for farmers published in Aberdeen, South Dakota starting in 1881. The magazine was primarily for male farmers but,

#### Settler 3 (M)

*The Home* section was geared toward female readers. In 1907, *Dakota Farmer* asked for letters explaining how women managed farm homes without hired girls.

## Settler 2 (F)

Helen Smith of Wimbledon, North Dakota won first prize and her letter appeared on December 15, 1907.

Helen Smith

"How to keep house without help, read a little, visit a little, and otherwise enjoy oneself? Well, that's an old and tried problem to many of us homemakers in these times of scarce and incompetent help, and I'm going to tell you my way.

To begin with, we live on a farm of about 500 acres and keep from 1 to 5 hired men. I also have 6 children under 10 years old. Our work seems to divide itself into two area, summer work and winter work. In the summer, we begin the day at five o'clock and have breakfast at six. I don't call the children down for the early breakfast with them. Perhaps it is a bad habit. Only the other day I heard a mother brag

Mother

My children always go to bed early and are up for breakfast!

Helen

Well, so do mine go to bed early. Eight o'clock sees them all tucked in, but I have a feeling that the little bodies are still tired from a long day's play, at six o'clock in the morning, and it only makes them cross and irritable the whole day through to drag them out of bed before their nap is out, so when breakfast is over, I put away the remains of

the meal, with the exception of a plate of bread and one of butter, a pitcher of milk and a dish of oatmeal for each little one; then I put up the children's dinner for school, mix the bread or work over the butter, or whatever other extra job there is to do, and by this time baby is generally heard from, and I commence to hear some disturbance upstairs. Mary, my little girl, 10 years old, dresses the little folks upstairs, while I give baby his bath, warm his milk, and put him into his buggy, where he spends a good deal of his time. Then comes a general scramble from above, and after an all-round wash, the little folks sit down to their oatmeal, bread, butter, and milk. When breakfast is over, my two little boys, aged six and eight, run out and bring in a supply of wood and coal.

#### Settler 5 (F)

Everyone in the family was expected to help on a farm unless they were an invalid or too young. Chores were based on both age and capability and were not gender specific.

#### Helen Smith –

While this was being done, Mary combs her hair and puts on a clean apron; then I wash, brush and tidy up the little boys, and off to school they all three go, leaving me at home with the three remaining little ones and my work.

#### Different reader for Helen

Next to do is to and make neat the last two little ones and send them out to play, with the caution that Ruth, aged five, is to mind Ray, aged three, and see that he doesn't get

hurt. Then to my work. I wash the dishes, put the meat over for dinner, sweep and tidy up the rooms down stairs, which takes till about 10 o'clock; then to the dinner. I first make the oven ready for the dessert, pie or pudding as the case may be. If there is bread to make, that goes in the oven just after the dessert. Next I get the vegetables ready, and while they are cooking, I run upstairs, make the beds and tidy up the rooms. Then I come down, set the table, take up the dinner, and make the gravy, and by this time the men are in to dinner and the little ones have to be washed and put into their high chairs. During the time all this has been doing, I have likely stopped two or three times to fix baby's milk. John dishes up for the little folks in high chairs, and I wait on the table and eat my dinner; then I take baby up, tend him and play with him about half an hour, while my dinner settles.

#### Settler 4 (F)

Organization clearly played an important role in the lives of women. Helen had a systematic way of getting her work done. Many other women, in their diaries echoed the importance of organization in their daily lives.

#### Helen

Then I wash the dishes, sweep the kitchen, and am ready by two o'clock for sewing or whatever else may be on hand. First of all, I comb, wash and put on a fresh apron, and make myself neat. I churn twice a week, and that has to be done in the afternoon as there is never time in the forenoon, and that takes about one hour of Wednesday and

Friday afternoons. I churn in the cellar, wash and salt the butter and leave it in the cellar till morning. I then work it over and pack it in the crocks. Then the rest of the afternoon is free for mending, sewing or whatever else needs to be done. Quite often at this time of day, John drives up and loads us in, to take a little drive with him to a neighbor's or around the field where he has something about the farm work to look after, and we always go, if possible. Then the children come home from school, and mamma has help. They mind the baby, hunt the eggs, bring up the cows, and if I haven't put a cake into the oven for supper before I washed the dinner dishes, which I often do, then Mary bakes one; and let me say right here that my little girl of 10 can

Mary

bake cake, set table, wash dishes and sweep with any housekeeper in the country!

Helen

and when mama is working with her and making a companion of her, she thinks tis all play, and she is laying by a store of knowledge and ideas of management, that will be of use some time in future years.

Settler 2 (F)

Ten year old Mary and her mother work closely together, and her mother relied on Mary to lighten her work load. Although the brothers' work is not defined very well, all school-aged children would be expected to help as much as possible. Even five-year-old Ruth was expected to mind three-year-old Ray.

Helen Smith –

I do all my own sewing, but I try to do most of that during vacation or in winter. We have supper in summer at seven; then Mary and I wash the dishes, the little boys bring in the kindling and night wood, and after a general foot washing, the little folks go up to bed and I undress baby and put him to bed and the day is done, with a few minutes of twilight to spend before the early bed time. I wash on Monday, or rather wash with John's help. I get things ready for the machine. The boiler is put on right after breakfast and I wash the dishes and get things ready for dinner while John does the machine work. Then we rinse, starch and get the clothes on the line before time to get the dinner on the table. Then I have the kitchen floor to clean and the work up stairs to do after dinner. After school, Mary and I bring in the clothes and fold them ready to iron Tuesday.

Settler 5 (F)

Clothes and linens made of cotton were always ironed following their washing. Metal irons were heated on the stove, used until they cooled, and then were replaced with another one that had been heating. Some women ironed everything, including all underwear that was worn.

Helen

Saturday morning Mary helps mama. She takes great pride in seeing how nicely she can do the work upstairs, sweeping, dusting, tidying up, and washing down the stair steps,

while I work downstairs. Saturday's baking takes most of the morning. Saturday is a busy day with just a few minutes to rest. The little folks also have to be bathed and all the little extras to be done in view of Sunday being a day of rest, with everything cooked for the meals, dish washing being the chief work of the day.

Helen third reader

Winter is a change of routine. We have breakfast at seven with all the children at the table. Then they do their chores and get ready for school. John takes them in winter. I take care of baby, and do whatever baking there is to do. After the lunch dishes are cleared away, I sit down to sew, or for a little visit with John as this is his slack time too; then at half past three he goes out and hitches up the team to go for the children, while I get supper, or dinner rather, which we eat as soon as the little folks get home from school, hungry as bears. When supper is over they all have a general good time until half past seven. Then they all go upstairs and get ready for bed. While John and the hired man finish the chores, I set the table, grind the coffee, cut the meat and set the pancakes, and the day's work is done, and we are all sitting down to a quiet evening by ourselves at half past eight. We often read aloud or a neighbor drops in to spend an hour or so and altogether we spend a quite cozy evening by the fire. John won't abide my sewing in the evening. He says daylight is time enough to work. John sometimes prepares the breakfast. His mother raised nine boys and he can cook with any woman, so while I am caring for baby, getting the little ones ready for breakfast and doing the hundred and one things that mama finds to do, the hired man does the chores, John



fries the meat, prepares the coffee, and bakes the pancakes, and he doesn't seem to notice the shock to his dignity at all. And so you have a picture of our years as they pass and pleasant and profitable ones they are, and, Oh how short a time can they last! It makes me tremble to think how soon 'twill all be changed and how lonely the house will be when they are all gone and just John and I left in the house alone. How will I keep our hands busy then?

All three readers together

Your reader and well wisher – Mrs. Helen Smith, Wimbledon, ND.

**Music and/or visuals**

Settler 3 (M)

Many women not only did housework, but they also helped with fieldwork.

Settler 2 (F)

Men also sometimes helped their spouses in domestic chores as John helped Helen.

Settler 1 (M)

John Steinberger worked as a:

John Steinberger

Bricklayer, farmer, carpenter, butcher, harness maker, blacksmith, and meat smoker.

Settler 4 (F)

He was also an accomplished knitter as told by Virginia-Lee Steinberger Bryans.

Virginia-Lee

You could hear the clickity click of his knitting needles as he made mittens and ear sox for his 10 children for winter, fall, and spring use. He used six needles.

Settler 2 (F)

Eva Eastman remembers milking cows, fieldwork, and doing dishes with her husband.

Eva Eastman

We had two teams; well we had eight horses, so of course we had to plow more. Well, he would drill and I would drag and things like that. Usually he would get up and take care of the horses in the morning and I'd get up and milk the cows and we'd come in and he would separate and I'd get breakfast...when we'd come in why I'd wash the dishes and he'd wipe them. That's the way we kind of done a lot of our work around here.

Settler 4 (F)

Katherine Misiolak of Pembina County, remembered long hours on the farm helping her husband whenever she could.

Katherine

While he would stretch out on the kitchen floor for a nap after dinner I would go out to the barn, have the horses all fed and watered and harnessed up again, ready to go when my husband was ready.

Settler 5 (F)

Annie Warner also worked in the fields, often taking her children with her.

Annie

The most I worked was in the hay field. Run the hay rake a couple of times for 'em. And then one year I cultivated the corn. We had a big corn field. I'd take the kids out in the field with me, then they could sit at the end of the rows and play.

Settler 3 (M)

Many women willingly offered their help to their husbands and worked side-by-side with them to try to make a success of farm life. Lizzie Tiede Broderson wore her husband's overalls.

Settler 1 (M)

One day a neighbor going by observed someone shocking a grain field and stopped to ask Chris [her husband] if he could hire his man after his shocking was done, but Chris replied,

Chris

“That’s not a hired man – that’s my wife!”

Settler 2 (F)

Minnie Dahlen was one of 13 children and a daughter who helped her father however she could.

Minnie Dahlen

When old enough, I got to be a real boy, you know; like a hired man --- milking, cleaning barns, and chores – helped plow with horses – worked like a man helping.

Settler 1 (M)

Nellie Erickson was a tomboy and her father’s right-hand helper.

Nellie Erickson

I was very much a tomboy. My dad always said that I was the best boy he had ‘cause I’d go with him and ride horseback when the boys thought it was too cold, and any chores that he did I was along with him. I shoveled manure in the barn -- I had my own pitchfork.

Settler 2 (F)

No matter how old the women were they worked hard with few exceptions. They met the challenge and most did it without complaining, as part of a partnership. You can

hear the thankfulness in Carrie Weinhandl's voice as she thinks of her mother and today's modern conveniences.

Carrie Weinhandl

We think we work hard nowadays, but when I picture all that my pioneer mother did, I fall to my knees and thank the Good Lord for all His blessings He has given us.

Settler 3 (M)

Not all women followed their husbands to the Dakota Prairie willingly. Emelia and Charles Griepentrog moved to Dakota in the spring of 1884. Emilia did not want to leave her home in Wisconsin and her adjustment to life in Dakota was painful.

Emelia

I didn't want to leave and come west, but Charlie said he was coming and if I wanted to live with him, I would have to come west. I even went so far as to try to burn the paper he had for his land in Dakota. I tried every way I could to get Charlie to change his mind. But Charlie's mind was made up, and I had the choice of going with him or giving him up. I decided to go with him. So in April 1884 Charlie loaded the furniture, machinery, lumber, and he bought a cow so that he could get his ticket free by having to ride with the car load of furniture and other things to take care of the cow. Of course Charlie started out before me so that I was alone to take the train and make the trip with the three boys –ages six, four, and two. Through the entire trip I was near tears, but I didn't give way to the tears. We stayed at the Fred Hoefs farm until Charlie was able to get the

house built on his own land. Hoefs had had diphtheria during the winter of 1883 and 1884. About the middle of the third week that we were there, our oldest boy was taken sick and they didn't have a doctor but he didn't get any worse. Then about five days after the oldest boy was taken sick, the middle boy was taken sick. The night before, the boy had told me that the new shoes which I had bought him before he came west made him too tired. During the day he had followed Mrs. Hoefs everywhere she went, and of course, he was tired, and that night he sat in my lap and told me that he was so tired and that his shoes made him tired and he wasn't going to wear them anymore. The next morning he didn't come down stairs as usual, so I went up to see what he was doing and found him on the floor by the side of his brother's bed. I called to him and told him not to go near his brother because he was sick. He looked up and said,

Young boy

I's sick too Mummy, my head hurts, I fall down.

Emelia

By noon that day Herman was too sick to talk. I asked Charlie to go for a doctor, but Fred said they didn't have time for such and that Charlie couldn't leave the fields. Otto, the oldest son, got well, but the middle son, Herman, died and was buried just across the fields northeast of our new home. When Otto was well and had been up a week, we moved to our new home. I lived alone for a time in the new home because Charlie had to work at the other farm and could only get home on Sundays. I cried from dawn to

dawn and from dark to dark. I was lonely, afraid to be alone. Of course the death of Herman upset me a great deal, and I had so much time to think of him that it really made it worse for me. Charlie came home for a few hours every Sunday to change clothing and see how I was, but he had to go back before dark in order to do the night's work. One Sunday, when he was home, I couldn't help but cry because he was up on the roof working and he whistled. I went out and asked him what he had to be so happy about, and then I broke down and cried. That was the first time he had seen my cry or knew that I did cry while he was away.

### **Music as lights out on settlers**

### **Flute music – return to Native American side**

#### **Native 2 (M)**

While the settlers usually had one wife for life, this was not necessarily true for the Native American. Pretty Shawl , Dakota Territory, said that she..

#### **Pretty Shawl**

Was married four times. We did not have any marriage ceremony. If a man and woman liked each other, they went to live in one of their parents' tipis, or the man would be given a tipi of his own by his parents. If they did not get along, they separated and lived with someone else. When they separated, the children were left to be taken care of by the grandparents.

#### Native 4 (F)

Courtship customs varied widely. In some tribes young people were always fully chaperoned and other societies they were left to do pretty much as they pleased.

#### Native 3 (M)

If a man wanted a girl, he began his courtship by giving presents to her and her family. He then asked the father for the girl. The father usually took his time saying “yes” as the longer he put off giving his girl away, the more presents he would get. The presents consisted of horses, weapons, or clothing.

#### Native 2 (M)

If the father liked the man and did not have anything against the man’s relatives, he let the girl go. There was no marriage ceremony. The man took the girl, and they lived with his parents until he was given a tipi or built one for himself. The best warriors could have as many wives as they could support. It was considered an honor to give a daughter to one of the warriors.

#### Native 5 (F)

In some Native American societies there was no courtship. The marriage was less a matter of romance than an arrangement for sound economic advantage. The union of a young woman to a man of her tribe was often arranged by her family



## Woman

With great attention to what was best for the prosperity of the families

### Native 4 (F)

As soon as an Indian maiden reached puberty and adult status, she and her parents began making plans for her marriage. The maiden didn't have much choice whether she would marry or not.

### Native 3 (M)

There was no place for a single woman in early Indian societies. Women were viewed as the natural complement of man; neither was complete without the other.

### Native 2 (F)

Not every young Indian woman consented to her parents' choice of husband, even after she heard threats and tales of what might happen to her if she did not marry this man.

### Native 1 (M)

Sometimes a young native woman would resort to desperate measures to rid herself of an unwanted husband. "A Leap to Death" a story of an unhappy young maiden:

### Native 3 (M)

A maiden was in love with a young man who was courting her, but her parents would not allow her to marry him. To get away from her suitor, they moved her from the village to a place to the north. There they chose a rich old shaman to be the girl's husband. Their daughter warned them that she did not like the man and that she was desperate. She was so desperate she would commit suicide if they insisted on the union. The parents did not heed her warnings and insisted she marry the old man anyway.

### Native 4 (F)

The bride stayed with her new husband for a short time, but she never spoke to him. One day she secretly packed her best dress and went into the woods.

### Native 3 (M)

Her unhappy husband was watching her, although she did not know it. He trailed her and saw her go to the top of some rocks near a waterfall, where she painted her face, dressed in her best clothes, and undid her braids, letting her heavy hair fall over her shoulders. She sat forlornly for a time, finally hearing a sound and noticing her husband's presence. Speaking to him she said:

### Maiden

I don't want you, yet you follow me.

Native 4 (F)

Then she sang a death song, picked up her shawl, wrapped it over her face, and leapt from the rock. The husband leaned out from the rock to see what had happened to her. About half way down, a spruce tree grew out from a ledge. She had fallen on it and hung there in space.

Native 3 (M)

In a few minutes the young woman swung off the limb, and the man saw her smash against the rocks in the water.

Native 4 (F)

For years if anyone passed there and mentioned the leaping of a woman, the waves dashed so high that no canoe could pass.

**Music sound effects (some kind of transition)**

Native 1 (M)

However, there are stories of a happy courtship, especially when the young warrior chose his wife because he loved her. Story of a bashful courtship

Native 3 (M)

A young man lived with his grandmother. He was a good hunter and wished to marry. He knew a girl who was a good moccasin maker, but she belonged to a great family. He wondered how he could win her.

Native 2 (F)

One day she passed the tent on her way to get water at the river. His grandmother was at work in the tepee with a pair of old worn-out sloppy moccasins. The young man sprang to his feet, and cried,

Young man

Quick, Grandmother --- let me have those old sloppy moccasins you have on your feet!

Grandmother

My old moccasins, what do you want of them?

Narrator 2 (F)

Cried the astonished woman.

Young man

Never mind! Quick! I can't stop to talk,

Native 3 (M)

Answered the grandson, as he caught up the old moccasins the old lady had doffed, and put them on. He threw a robe over his shoulders, slipped through the door, and hastened to the watering place. The girl had just arrived with her bucket.

Young man

Let me fill your bucket for you,

Native 3 (M)

Said the young man.

Young girl

Oh no, I can do it.

Native 2 (F)

Replied the young girl.

Young Man

Oh, let me, I can go in the mud. You surely don't want to soil your moccasins,

Native 3 (M)

And taking the bucket he slipped in the mud, taking care to push his sloppy old moccasins out so the girl could see them.

Native 2 (F)

She giggled, and said,

Young girl

My, what old moccasins you have.

Young Man

Yes, I have nobody to make me a new pair,

Native 3 (M)

He answered.

Young girl

Why don't you get your grandmother to make you a new pair?

Native 2 (F)

She asked.

Young man

She's old and blind and can't make them any longer. That's why I want **you**.

Young girl

Oh, you're fooling me. You aren't speaking the truth.

Native 2 (F)

She replied smiling.

Young Man

Yes, I am. If you don't believe ---come with me **now**!

Native 2 (F)

The girl looked down; so did the young man. At last he said softly:

Young man

Well, which is it? Shall I take up your bucket, or will you go with me?

Native 2 (F)

She answered, still more softly:

Young girl

I guess I'll go with you!

Native 2 (F)

The girl's aunt came down to the river, wondering what kept her niece so long. In the mud she found two pairs of moccasin tracks close together; at the edge of the water stood:

Native 2 (F) Native 3 (M) Together

An empty bucket.

**Music or sound effects**

Native 4 (F)

Being a mother and rearing a healthy family were the ultimate achievements for a woman in the North American Indian societies. There was no confusion about the role of a woman and very few other acceptable patterns for feminine existence.

Native 5 (F)

The Native women considered themselves an extension of the spirit mother, and the key to the continuation of their race.

Native 2 (F)

Many children were needed to help with the work and to take care of the parents as they grew older. In those simpler days, children were a couple's savings account and insurance.

Native 4 (F)

A Native woman proved her courage by her brave conduct during childbirth, just as a man proved his courage in battle. They were expected to



Native 5 (F)

Endure the pain without crying out,

Native 2 (F)

And would often be chided for being cowardly and failing to set a good example for others.

Native 5 (F)

During her labor an Indian woman was usually assisted by her female relatives or other women of her tribe who had special knowledge of birth customs.

Native 4 (F)

They supported the woman as she knelt or squatted, rubbed her back,

Native 2 (F)

Pressed down on her abdomen to force the child out,

Native 5 (F)

Encouraged the mother, and cared for her and the child immediately after the birth.

Native 2 (F)

Women generally gathered together for the birth of babies,

Native 4 (F)

But in some North American tribes the expectant mother had to face the birth process alone.

#### Native 5 (F)

Near the time of delivery, the women instructed the expectant mother to go to the bank of the nearest river and build a shelter with a strong, forked stick positioned in the center. Supporting herself with this stick, she gave birth all alone.

#### Native 2 (F)

And then immediately waded into the stream, even if she had to break ice to do so, washed herself and the baby, and returned home to continue her normal life.

#### Native 4 (F)

Some societies had a special segregation hut away from the main dwelling where mothers gave birth. Sometimes the mother and baby were required to stay segregated for a period of time, sometimes as long as two to three months.

#### Native 1 (M)

Unfortunately, sometimes all the special care and ceremony were not enough to enable the vulnerable infant to survive. Even though Indian mothers could expect to lose at least half of their children in infancy or childhood, each death was a cause for sorrow.

**Sound of a flute moving into settler side with different music**

Settler 1 (M)

The settlers as well experienced sorrow because of illness and death. Good medical help was rare in the early prairie, so they did what they could to stay healthy and cure illness.

Settler 2 (F)

The lack of medical help made any type of illness serious. It was not unusual for families to lose several children to illness.

Settler 4 (F)

Medicine was scarce, but families used what was available and what they believed worked.

Woman

We always had a supply of kerosene on hand, but it was used as a medicine. When someone in the family was taken sick with a cold or stomach pains, a spoon of kerosene was given them, and they soon were up and around again. We hated the sight of the kerosene, but it helped us and was one of the remedies used by all families.

Settler 5 (F)

Childbirth could be quite perilous for both mother and baby, if there were any complications. Often the environment a baby was born into could also be hazardous.

Rachel Bella Calof, whose family homesteaded thirty miles north of Devils Lake, had nine children.

#### Rachel

As the time for the birth of my first child drew closer, I began to weigh the uncertainties which faced me. If there were to be any serious problems in the birth, either for the infant or myself, one or both of us could die since there would be no skilled help available to us. I didn't even have a suitable cloth to wrap the little child upon its arrival. Each day my fears and doubts increased as my time moved ever nearer. I was totally ignorant about the entire subject matter.

At four o'clock on a Saturday morning, I brought forth my first child, a girl, Minnie. I had a hard time and I literally tried to crawl up the walls with the pain of it. Abe helped as much as he could and he was delighted to cut her umbilical cord. Two days after the birth, Abe left for his distant job and I was left alone. The consequences of his absence were compounded by the fact that the wells had again gone dry. The closest water supply was five miles distant and the cattle would have to be led there once each day. We had a little water left in the house for which I was really thankful because it was clean and contained no worms. For the first three days of her life, the only nourishment Minnie received was sweetened water.

#### Settler 2 (F)

The birth of Rachel's second child was truly horrific.

## Rachel

In the early morning hours of a Thursday, I climbed onto my straw-covered “delivery” table to give birth to my daughter Hannah. The straw was prickly and cold, and as I labored I became thoroughly chilled. Abe summoned my mother-in-law, and seeing how cold I was, she ordered that a lid from the hot stove be placed close to me to warm me.

The first experience my poor baby knew upon entering this world was one of agony. Leaving her peaceful home in the womb, she was immediately plunged into intense pain and suffering. As she emerged, her elbow was in contact with the hot stove lid and she was severely burned. She was left lying on the table until the afterbirth came about a half hour later. I believe now that during this entire time the infant was in contact with the hot stove lid. By the time we realized that the little one was injured, great damage had been done. The poor baby screamed until she had no voice left, only a sound like a mewling kitten. The child was wrapped in a cloth and placed near me, but I insisted on examining her to learn the cause of her pain and found a large hole burned into her elbow, with the burnt tissue already falling away from the area. The baby suffered terribly.

Although the winter was drawing to a close, it had been especially long and severe and now we were down to the last of our food and fuel. We were in a desperate way. Added to Hannah’s injury and my own debilitated condition, we were now faced with starvation and freezing.

Abe left for town with a load of hay to exchange for wood and food, and hopefully some kind of medicine for Hannah. A blizzard forced him to stay in town for two days, so he did not return for four days, by which time we were literally starving and freezing. At last Abe returned with two buckets of coal, twenty-five cents worth of sugar, a pound of coffee, and some supposedly pickled herring which upon examination turned out to be, horror of horrors, pickled pigs' feet. He also brought a pound of butter and, best of all, some ointment for Hannah's arm.

I don't know how much the medicine helped, but miraculously Hannah's arm began slowly to heal. The mortified flesh continued to fall away for some time, but new tissue formed underneath and she improved.

### **Music**

#### Settler 3 (M)

The prairie was beautiful and productive, but she could also be very cruel.

#### Settler 4 (F)

Whatever went wrong in their lives – ultimately came from bad weather. None of them were accustomed to the pace and the scale of prairie weather. The ceaseless wind,

#### Settler 1 (M)

The epic lightning storms, the abrupt irrevocable droughts.

Settler 5 (F)

The sky was so immense, the atmosphere so volatile that it only heightened the monotonous absences of the earth:

Settler 3 (M)

Absence of trees, landmarks, features, variety.

Settler 2 (F)

But when a blizzard struck, the very absence was erased. When the fierce winds swept the blinding snow over hill and valley, everything looked alike and it was almost impossible to find your way. Norwegian immigrant Lars Stavig said of his new home in Day County, Dakota Territory,

Lars

Many a brave pioneer who came out here with great hopes and plans for a long, prosperous and happy life, in his own home with his family, was cut down in the prime of life. This cruel, treacherous enemy, the blizzard, spared no one.

Settler 1 (M)

The first bad blizzard came on January 7, 1873, and blew without cease for three days. Tilla Dahl, the daughter of Norwegian immigrants, remembers that her mother:

Tilla

Was out visiting neighbors when the storm struck. My father, Niels Dahl, concluded his wife was lost and decided he must go out in search of her. Before he left, he filled the cook stove with wood, drew up three chairs a safe distance from the fire and instructed us three daughters: Caroline, six; me, four and Nellie, eighteen months

Niels

Sit in these chairs, fold your hands in your laps, and repeat the Lord's Prayer until I return. Under no circumstances should you leave the chairs.

Settler 4 (F)

Astonishingly, the children obeyed, and Niels found them just where he had left them when he returned safely with his frightened wife. Tilla wrote that at some point during the storm the temperature fell to 40 below zero.

Mary Larabee

April 1883

Dear Patty,

As I have not written to you for so long I must give you a story of the blizzard which raged here this winter. It was one of the worst I have ever seen. The winter has been very cold and I scarcely see how the emigrants who landed in Carrington have existed, as there were no trains in there all winter. The snow was so great that the Northern



Pacific abandoned everything until spring. A number of boarding cars were left there which the people used as homes and a quantity of rail road ties which were taken possession of and used as fuel. Some provisions had been left in the cars when they were abandoned and these and the jackrabbits which they managed to kill, kept them alive through the winter.

#### Settler 5 (F)

The morning of January 12, 1888 was a beautiful morning. Thomas Pirnie, remembered when he awoke

#### Thomas

The sun shone bright. It had snowed the night before, but at daybreak it was like an April morning, with just a breath of breeze coming out of the southwest. I told my family we were going to have a January thaw.

#### Settler 1 (M)

Farmers took advantage of the pleasant weather to go to town or to fetch hay from the prairie. Owing to the balmy conditions of the air, probably a greater percentage of children went to school that day than on any previous day for weeks.

#### Settler 2 (F)

Unfortunately, no one knew how quickly the beautiful day would turn deadly.

#### Settler 1 (M)

On January 12, 1888, one of the worst blizzards of the century broke over the center of the North American continent. Out of nowhere, a soot gray cloud appeared over the northwest horizon. The air grew still for a long, eerie measure, then the sky began to roar and a wall of ice dust blasted the prairie.

#### Settler 3 (M)

The cold front raced through Montana before dawn; went through North Dakota while farmers were out doing their early morning chores; roared into South Dakota during morning recess; Nebraska as school clocks rounded toward dismissal.

#### Settler 4 (F)

In three minutes the front subtracted 18 degrees from the air's temperature. Then evening gathered in and temperatures kept dropping steadily, hour after hour, in the northwest gale. Before midnight wind chills were 40 below zero. That's when the killing happened.

#### Settler 5 (F)

By morning on Friday the thirteenth, hundreds of people lay dead on the Dakota and Nebraska prairie. Many of them children who had fled – or been dismissed from — country schools at the moment when the wind shifted and the sky exploded.

### Settler 2 (F)

Only the worst blizzards are given names. The blizzard of January 12-13 of 1888 is called the Children's Blizzard because of the large number of children, some entire families that died trying to get home in that blizzard.

### Music

### Settler 1 (M)

Blizzards killed in the winter, but the summer and fall were not immune to nature's wrath.

### Settler 3 (M)

Prairie fires moved swiftly, and could be deadly. Terkel Fuglestad lost much of his first crop to a prairie fire, but was thankful that was all he lost.

### Terkel

It was October 1885. For three days the air was filled with smoke and a strong wind was raging from the northwest. The third day the wind increased, and the smoke became thicker. I was with Sven Olgard out threshing seven miles away. I knew my wife was home alone with a little child. Right after dinner I started for home. I had just stepped in the door and said hello when I was out again, and I fled to the neighbors to borrow oxen to plow around the wheat stacks. But just then I saw flames a half-mile away, and in a few minutes the flames were over us. There was no danger for the house, barn and

haystack. I had summer fallowed around them and mostly around the side of the house where the storm came from. We were not afraid for our lives, but it was horrible to see flames all around us. We had a lot of rain that summer, and the grass stood very high which gave the flames a better chance to spread; but the flames went past like a wind with a thunderous noise. When we came outside, the prairie was black, and worse, the air was full of smoke.

#### Settler 5 (F)

In 1883 Ernest Kohlmeier left Germany and eventually settled in Rolette County. He lived with and worked for his brother at St. Thomas until the fall of 1884.

#### Ernest

In September of 1884, I made my first trip to Rolette County; in the party were five other Germans. We drove a team of mules and a covered wagon. One night on the way up we camped on the shore of Rock Lake in Towner County. We pitched our tent and prepared for the night. We expected to have good beds there, because the reeds were six feet high and there was an abundance of old grass on the ground. For some reason or another we did not go to sleep after we had turned in. We started to tell stories and kept that up until quite late. About eleven o'clock we heard a roar as of a terrible wind. We jumped up and ran outside. Then we saw a big prairie fire racing towards us. We hastily pulled up our tent, loaded it on the wagon, hitched up the mules, and drove into

the lake as far and as fast as we could. No sooner had we gotten into the water than the fire swept by us. If we had gone to sleep, we would all have been burned to death.

Native 2 (M)

Native American villages were also vulnerable to prairie fires.

Pretty Shawl

Once we had just moved camp and had our tipis put up when we saw a large prairie fire coming. We took pails and threw water from a nearby creek on the tipis. We tried to get the horses together and drive them across the creek but could not get them all. Children were also taken across the creek. When the fire came through the camp, many babies and some of the older people were killed. Some of the tipis were burned down, and many horses died.

### **Music visuals for transition**

Settler 1 (M)

Life was sometimes hard on the prairie, but Indians and settlers both found time to enjoy life.

Native 1 (F)

Native American women loved games, sports, and races. They did not believe that physical strength was “unfeminine”; the strongest woman was the best mother and homemaker.

Native 4 (F)

Those women who were artistic spent their leisure time making ceramics, pottery and other crafts.

Native 2(M)

The Sioux often arranged a formal social ball for their young people. The Night Dance took place on a summer evening in a large tipi set up near the center of camp. The sides of the tipi were rolled up so that spectators could join in the fun.

Native 4 (F)

As is typical of young people's dances, the girls sat on one side of the lodge

Native3 (M)

and the boys congregated on the other side.

Native 5 (F)

When the drumming began, each girl walked over to the boys' side and chose a partner by kicking the sole of his moccasin. The couples, holding each other by the belt, formed a line and danced in a two-step motion around the fire.

Native 1 (M)

The next dance it was the boys' turn to choose partners. Midway in the dancing, a feast was served.

## Native 2

If two young people became attracted to each other during a Night Dance, the girl might invite the young man to meet her in front of her family's tipi.

## **Music and dancing - Native drumming**

### Settler 2 (F)

We were socially active when time and weather allowed. We didn't have to travel great distances for entertainment, nor did we need to use a lot of money. We simply made do with what we had to enjoy life.

### Settler 3 (M)

Edna Goheen remembered the very popular box socials her father auctioned.

### Edna

Each woman and girl brought a highly decorated box of food which was auctioned off to determine her lunch partner. Somehow or other they were able to identify the boxes of all the pretty girls, so that not only her male admirer, but all the other young men knew whose it was and the boxes often sold at very high prices.

Elaine

We had Ladies Aid meetings you know. The little girls always went along, because the children also got together. Often times on Sundays, especially in summer, we'd have a big picnic after church. Everybody would bring food; they would have all kinds of food.

Sarah

The Fourth of July was a big day. We used to gather near the Red Murphy place with people coming from miles and miles. We had horse races, foot races, and homemade ice cream. Sometimes we'd play baseball. I remember when they had a wash tub of lemonade and Joe Partridge fell into it. He was picked out, and the lemonade had a good flavor!

Christine

We did a lot of visiting with neighbors, sometimes every night. The adults played cards and the children played games. There was always singing. We would gather around the piano or organ, whatever you had, and we'd be singing and playing games.

**Songs here cast sing – involve audience too**

Joanne

We had quilting bees and I thought that was a lot of fun. We usually went to a place where they had a lot of room. We would talk and quilt for most of the afternoon. We all brought food and made a party of it.



Michael

We loved to dance and dances were very common. These were held in barns, granaries, or houses. Entire families and neighborhoods would come at distances of up to 30 miles to attend a dance. For those traveling this far, it would take two and a half hours to get there.

Harriet

A dance was considered to be worth the long ride. When the children became tired, they would be put to sleep in any available space while the adults continued to kick up their heels, many times until early morning.

Adam

We would dance all night. Everybody – Bohemians, Norwegians – it didn't matter what they were – we just went and had a good time.

**Music plays and fades to darkness**

**Lights up on one area with readers in place**

Settler 4 (F)

Strong women helped to tame the prairies of Dakota Territory.

Settler 5 (F)

Hardy souls still live on the prairies and work the land.

Native 3 (M)

The Sioux believe the honor of the people lies in the moccasin tracks of the women.

Native 4 (F)

Walk the good road, my daughter, and the buffalo herds wide and dark as cloud shadows moving over the prairie will follow you. Be dutiful, respectful, gentle and modest. If the pride and the virtue of the women are lost, the spring will come but the buffalo trails will turn to grass.

Native 5 (F)

Be strong, with the warm, strong heart of the earth. No people go down until their women are weak and dishonored, or dead upon the ground. Be strong and sing the strength of the Great Powers within you, and all around you.”

**Music and dance Settlers and Natives together in a circle as lights out**

## CHARACTERS

### Native American Readers:

Five readers minimum

Combination of men and women

More women than men

### Settler Readers:

Five readers minimum

Combination of men and women

More women than men

Characters with names may be separate or assigned to one of the five readers.

## WORKS CITED

- Adams, William. *Institute Book of Readers Theatre: A Practical Guide for School, Theater & Community*. Chapel Hill: Professional Press, 2003. Print.
- Coger, Leslie and Melvin R. White. *Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature*. Atlanta: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1967. Print.
- Tanner, Fran. *Readers Theatre Fundamentals*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Topeka: Clark Publishing, 1993. Print.

## REFERENCES

- Albors, Evertt C., Tweton,D. Jerome, eds. *The Way it Was, The North Dakota FrontierExperience, Book One: The Sod-busters*. Fessenden, North Dakota: The GrassRoots Press, 1996. Print.
- Albors, Evertt C., Tweton,D. Jerome, eds. *The Way it Was, The North Dakota Frontier Experience, Book Five Native People*. Fessenden, North Dakota: The Grass Roots Press, 2002. Print.
- Calof, Rachel. *Rachel Calof's Story*. Indiana: Indian University Press, 1995. Print
- Hampsten, Elizabeth. *To All Inquiring Friends, Letters, Diaries and Essays in North Dakota 1880-1910*. Grand Forks: Department of English University of North Dakota, 1980. Print
- Laskin, David. *The Children's Blizzard*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004. Print
- McLaughlin, Marie L. *Myths and Legends of the Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. Nerburn, Kent, Mengelkoch, Louise, ed. *Native American Wisdom*. California: New World Library, 1991. Print.

Niethammer, Carolyn. *Daughters of the Earth, the Lives and Legends of*

*American Indian*. New York: Touchstone, 1977. Print.

Sandoz, Mari. *These Were the Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,

1985. Print.

Witteman, Barbara. *Prairie in Her Heart, Pioneer Women of North Dakota*.

Chicago: Arcadia Publishing. 2002. Print.